

Sperry Corn Elevator Complex
North side of Weber Avenue,
west of Edison Street
Stockton
San Joaquin County
California

HAER No. CA-47

HAER
CAL.
39-STOCK,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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1-

Sperry Corn Elevator Complex

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Location: North of Weber Avenue, west of Edison Street
Stockton, San Joaquin County, California

UTM: 10.649350.4201690
Quad: Stockton West, California 7.5'

Date of Construction: 1920. Adjacent warehouse facilities represents
alterations of 1949, 1953, 1960s, 1970s.

Present Owner: City of Stockton
Department of Community Development
6 East Lindsey Street
Stockton, California 95202

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Sperry Corn Elevator Complex is a reminder of the
great Sperry milling enterprises. Not constructed
until 1920, the elevator played a distinct role in the
Sperry operations and, more importantly, was the major
impetus which turned the San Joaquin Valley into a
major corn growing area.

Historian: John W. Snyder
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Edited, Typed and
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DESCRIPTION

The Sperry Corn Elevator Complex is a single reinforced concrete structure approximately seven stories high, and consists of a mill tower which houses the elevating machinery and approximately one-half of a group of eight 8-foot by 8-foot square storage bins. Adjacent to these eight square bins is a bank of twelve large circular bins arranged in three rows of four and separated by six concave-sided diamond and four triangular shaped bins. These smaller diamond and triangular bins are not visible from the exterior of the structure, as they are formed at the juncture of each of the four circular shaped bins. Grain and flour handling machinery is housed in a single-story structure located on top of the storage bins and mill tower.

In design, the seven-story mill tower is a three-part vertical composition with differentiated end bays. A combination of fixed and hinged sash are set in recessed panels. The building is crowned with a flat roof, bracketed cornice and frieze of triglyph motifs. The bulging sides of the storage bins extend to the west of the elevator tower; their smooth curves create an intriguing pattern of dark and light vertical strips, and contrast interestingly with the more formally architectonic design of the elevator tower.

In function, grain was delivered by rail car (later by truck), and was unloaded into an underground bin, from which it was moved by horizontal auger to the basement level of the mill tower. From this level, it was moved upward through the various levels of the mill tower, and through the milling process, until it reached the grain and flour handling machinery at the top level. It was then placed, by means of conveyor belt and tubes, into storage in the various bins (see photos CA-47-19 through CA-47-21). From storage, the milled grain or flour was loaded into rail cars or trucks by means of overhead loading tubs (see photos CA-47-24 and CA-47-25).

HISTORY

The Sperry Corn Elevator Complex is a latter-day reminder of the great Sperry milling enterprise which opened its first office in Stockton in 1852, and grew to the fourth largest operation of its type in the United States before merging to form the Sperry Division of General Mills. Located approximately between Weber Avenue and the Stockton Ship Channel, the corn elevator, built in 1920, played a distinctive role in Sperry operation and, more importantly, was the impetus which turned the San Joaquin Valley into a major corn growing area.

At the turn of the century, San Joaquin Valley farmers found it difficult to manage corn crops. Inadequate storage facilities, inefficient drying processes, and rodent depredation discouraged corn production. It remained for Edward J. Luke, manager of Sperry Mills in Stockton, to suggest that a

concrete corn elevator be constructed to encourage corn cultivation. The company adopted the proposal and, in 1917, held an open house, called Corn Day, for 150 local farmers. Apparently the promotion was successful, for by 1920 there were between 25,000 and 35,000 acres of the San Joaquin Valley in corn production. Today, corn remains a major San Joaquin Valley crop.

Construction of the elevator began in May 1920. Costing \$150,000, the elevator had a capacity of 150,000 bushels. The workhouse, or mill tower, which contains the elevating machinery, measures approximately 35 feet long by 22 feet wide and is 104 feet high. The adjacent storage bin area is approximately 45 feet wide by 67 feet long. The elevator made it possible to handle grain in bulk and thus cut the production cost for the farmer, miller, and consumer. Concrete construction offered fire, water, and rodent assistance, improved sanitary conditions, and lowered construction costs.

After Sperry Flour Mills moved to Vallejo in 1927, the corn elevator complex was occupied by the Taylor Milling Company. In 1936, the Western Industrial Engineering Company of Los Angeles modernized the entire mill complex with new brick warehouses, new roofs, additional reinforcing, and other improvements. On January 1, 1946, Ralston-Purina took over the mill; later, on October 1, 1972, Western Consumers, the largest producer of dairy feed in the western United States bought the complex. Recent improvements have combined to create a totally modern, efficient complex, one of the largest in the West. The Sperry Corn Elevator Complex is but one element in the larger milling complex. Milling operations at the site ceased in July 1984, when the city of Stockton acquired the property for redevelopment.

EDWARD J. LUKE

Affixed to the east exterior wall of the mill house, near the entrance, was a bronze plaque commemorating Edward J. Luke (it has been removed and is in storage for preservation). The following quotes identify Mr. Luke and discuss his significance to the Sperry operations:

"A merciful death ended the long suffering of Edward J. Luke, manager of the Stockton properties of the Sperry Flour Company, yesterday afternoon at 5:45 o'clock at his home on Bours Park, following a day and a night of unconsciousness. For more than two years Mr. Luke had been afflicted with an intestinal disorder that the physician's and surgeon's skill could not cure and which inflicted upon him months of physical misery. Through it all Ed Luke fought as bravely and as smilingly as human ever faced his misfortunes, and his kindly, generous and tender regard for the feelings of others never for an instant failed him.

"Mr. Luke came to Stockton in 1910 to manage the Capitol mills and soon was at the head of all the properties of the Sperry Flour company in this city. He entered the milling business as a boy and step by step worked

his way from the lowliest position to the top, and none in the employ of that great concern was held to higher esteem or enjoyed more confidence in his business judgement than was true of the relations between Mr. Luke and the higher officials of the Sperry company.

"Mr. Luke was preceded to the grave by his wife, Mrs. Anne Luke, about five years ago. Two daughters, Mrs. Edna Sinclair and Miss Grace Luke, survive him. Happiest was he at his fireside with his loved ones and all the ideals of home were cherished by him. Death came in Mr. Luke's 56th year.

"Mr. Luke was known all along the coast as foremost in milling circles and his success in Stockton was remarkable. He came to Stockton in 1911 [sic] from the Port Costa mill, where he had charge of the cereal department, becoming a part of the Sperry Flour company. He took charge of the Capitol Mills here and made a success of that plant from the start. From the Capitol Mills he was placed in charge of the Union Mills and this position made him the general manager of all the Stockton properties of the Sperry Flour company.

"When he took charge of the Union Mill business was slack. Soon he had things going in shifts and the output of the plant was greatly increased. Today due to his management very largely the mill is turning out four times the amount of flour it did when he took charge.

"Mr. Luke was born in New York City 56 years ago and came to California when but a mere lad of six years. His first employment was in the Union Iron Works as a moulder. In 1888 he went to the Yolo Mills in San Francisco and this was his first experience as a flour mill worker. He worked in the office, drove wagon and did many things that a boy could be called to do and liked his job.

In 1906, the Yolo Mill was destroyed by fire and for the next year he was in the employ of the Pacific Cereal Association. Seward McNear prevailed upon him to go to the Port Costa mill where he remained until the consolidation which brought him to Stockton.

The Sperry Corn Elevator would have been among the last buildings planned under Luke's management, and thus were a logical choice for a commemorative plaque.

SIGNIFICANCE

This historic complex is associated with the legacy of Austin Sperry, whose milling company significantly affected the economy of this region between 1852 and 1927. On March 25, 1985, the Sperry Corn Elevator Complex was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, significant at the local level under Criteria A, B, and C.

PROJECT INFORMATION

The Stockton Downtown Redevelopment Project has been facilitated by Federal assistance in the form of an Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) of \$5.2 million from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and a \$623,205 grant from the Economic Development Agency (EDA), both received in 1980. The city used the EDA grant for seawall construction along the Stockton Ship Channel, and for bank stabilization work along relocated Mormon Slough.

(Mormon Slough had been relocated in 1972 during construction of nearby Interstate 5, to facilitate location of the interchange between Interstate 5 and State Highway 4.) The city leveraged the UDAG monies with city and private funds to produce an investment ratio of better than 5.27 to 1. UDAG funds facilitated land acquisition, infrastructure construction, and will assist with the relocation of existing railroad tracks from Weber Avenue.

The land on which the Sperry Corn Elevator Complex is located is part of a site proposed for condominium development. Located beyond the boundary of the UDAG assistance area, this land is designated on the approved Redevelopment Master Plan for residential condominiums, with no direct Federal assistance.

A number of elements of the Stockton Downtown Redevelopment Project have been completed. The Nippon Hospital has been restored and adaptively reused to provide 150 units of Section 8 housing for the elderly. Also complete are the medical-dental center, the first phase of a 158-berth marina, two of four planned office buildings, the adaptive restoration of the Sperry Union Flour Mill, and associated parking and pedestrian spaces. In addition, two phases of the garden apartments located south of Weber Avenue and across from the Sperry Corn Elevator Complex are complete. And though not formally a part of this redevelopment project, the Sperry Office Building, located within the project boundary, has been restored for offices in a manner which preserves its historic architectural characteristics.

The Waterfront Condominium Development which affects the Sperry Corn Elevator Complex site will consist of 120 housing units located on nine acres. It will be comprised of four mid-rise condominium buildings with underlying design criteria of luxury, safety and convenience. Among the standard features of each building complex will be underground parking, private elevator lobbies, and penthouses. This development will be located on the western point of the overall redevelopment project, overlooking both the Stockton Ship Channel and Mormon Slough, with additional boat docks to be built on the Stockton Ship Channel facing the condominiums.

Use of the UDAG funds required compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Through careful coordination with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the city achieved this compliance with a finding of no adverse effect on the Nippon Hospital, the Eureka Warehouse, and the Sperry Office Building. An adverse effect finding with regard to the

Sperry Corn Elevator Complex resulted in execution of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in 1985. The MOA required recordation of the complex to the standards of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), with the further stipulation that all documentation be accepted by HAER prior to any demolition activity. Copies of the documentation are to be made available to the State Historic Preservation Officer and appropriate local archives.

The foregoing, with attached photographs, comprises the required recordation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

C. H. Page & Associates, Inc., "Cultural Resource Documentation," City of Stockton, July 30, 1979.

W. Kulm, "Request for Determination of Eligibility - Sperry Corn Elevator - Stockton, California," City of Stockton, March 5, 1985.

"Preliminary Case Report, Sperry Corn Elevator," City of Stockton, May 1985.

"Edward J. Luke, Sperry Flour Manager, Dies Following Months of Cruel Suffering," Stockton Record, August 1, 1919. "Edward J. Luke," Stockton Record, August 1, 1919.

Elev. 202.55 ±

Corrugated Sheet metal Roofhouse

Wood & Metal Cornice

Roof Elevation Varies

31.30'

7th FLR.

Varies 0.60' to 0.85'

6th FLR.

Stairwell (typ)

5th FLR.

4th FLR.

0.43' (typ)

3rd FLR.

2nd FLR.

22.43'

MAIN FLR.

Elev. = 101.95

BASEMENT

B

C

100' ±

BIN

BIN

BIN

BIN

BIN

73.5 ±

BIN

20'

BIN

13.05'

13'

12'

Elev

100.00 ±

Natural Ground

13 ± (typ)

8 ±

8 ±

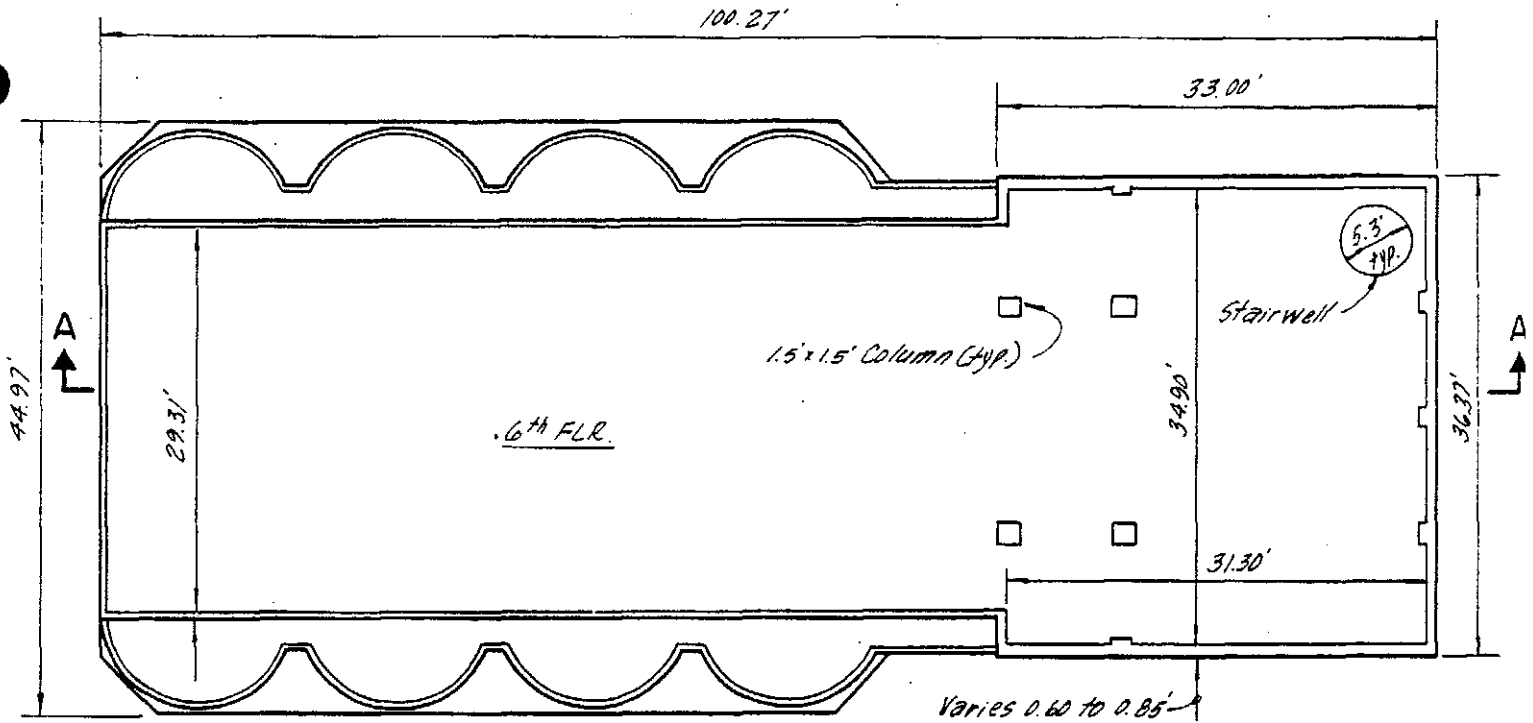
14.05'

100.27'

SECTION A-A

Scale: 1" = 15'

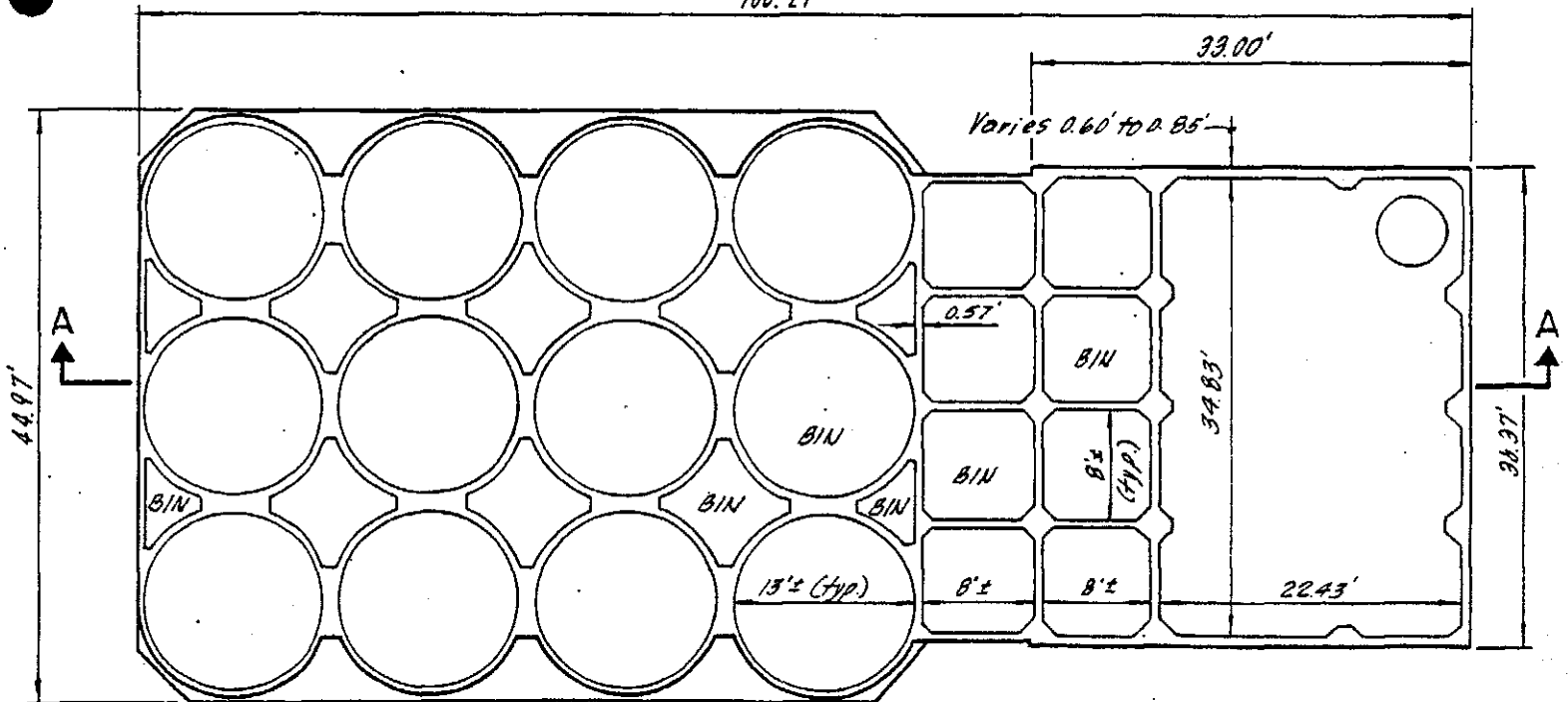
City of Stockton Datum.



SECTION B-B

Scale: 1" = 15'

100.27'



SECTION C-C

Scale: 1" = 15'